

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE :
THEIR CONTEMPORARY ROLES
PROCEEDINGS



2019

**THE 3rd ENGLISH LETTERS
UNDERGRADUATE CONFERENCE**



ELAC
English Letters Academic Club



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English Letters Undergraduate Conference

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE: THEIR CONTEMPORARY ROLES PROCEEDINGS

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Gabriella Ery Kusumaningtyas

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CONTEMPORARY ROLE OF ENGLISH IN THE ACADEMIC WORLD

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Abstract

The role of English in the academic world has become more prominent for global citizens since English proficiency has been set as the standard requirements of graduate program acceptance both nationally and internationally. Therefore, this paper attempts to provide insights into current circumstances of English proficiency demands in the context of the graduate program, especially for international students of which Indonesians fall into the category. To better understand the circumstances, this paper collected information from publications related to master's degree student flows and admission requirements concerning standardized English tests, the Internet-based test (iBT) of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL[®]) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS[™]) Academic test, to provide context to the language demands set by the program and gather statistics from two of the internationally acknowledged standardized English tests for academic purposes to illustrate the current situation of the Indonesians' English proficiency. From the discussions, the statistics point out that the overall performance of Indonesian test-takers has met the minimum standard requirements set by overseas universities and scholarships.

Keywords: English performance, Indonesians, standardized English tests

Introduction

English has been used as a *lingua franca* for centuries due to the British Empire colonies and geopolitical dominance since the late 18th century. Since then, English has been recognized and spoken as a mother tongue or an official language by many countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia, Britain, New Zealand, Singapore, Jamaica, Uganda, and some other countries across the continents. This stands as proof of English as a global language, which is “a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country” (Crystal, 2003, p. 3).

However, the growth of English influence through geopolitical dominance has subsided, and the expansion of English in the twenty-first century has shifted into the medium of communication both in domestic and professional life. English has taken its contemporary roles in international relations, the media, international travel, international safety, and education. In the context of international relations, English is used as the working language in international gatherings and proceedings of various discussions on science, humanities, and religions. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to encounter English in various kinds of publications, advertisements, broadcasts, cinemas, and popular songs. In addition to that, international travel – for whatever reasons – brings immediate linguistic consequences which later can evolve into a major influence on the contemporary use of world Englishes (Buschfeld, Hoffmann, Huber & Kautzsch, 2014). In international safety, the need for a *lingua franca* is immense in controlling the operations of international transports, especially the air and water transport operations. Finally, in the area of education, English is not only prominent in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) but also in the context of education in general. In many countries, English has become the medium of instruction in higher education, even in countries where English has no official status. This might be because many references are published in English. Hence, in the academic world, the role of English has become more prominent for global citizens, especially in the opportunity of pursuing higher education.

More and more university undergraduates are postponing their involvement in the professional world after completing their tertiary education for various reasons. First of all, present-day Indonesia still looks highly upon education and the majority of Indonesians are competing for higher education due to professional demands. Graduating from the master program gives a bigger chance to avoid entry-level jobs, and this alone becomes a significant reason for people to continue their studies in the graduate program. There are, however, people who consider further study as a way of self-actualization. The need for deeper understanding and competency in their field of interest becomes the biggest drive in their pursuit of further studies. For these reasons, English proficiency for those wanting to pursue their studies becomes inevitable.

Therefore, this paper attempts to provide insights into current circumstances of English proficiency demands in the context of the graduate program, especially for international students of which Indonesians fall into the category. This paper collects information from publications related to master's degree student flows and admission requirements concerning standardized English tests, the Internet-based test (iBT) of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL®) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS™) Academic test, to provide context to the language demands set by the program and gather statistics from two of the internationally acknowledged standardized English tests for academic purposes to illustrate the current situation of Indonesians' English proficiency.

Student Flows in Indonesia

Inbound Student Flows

In 2018, the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemristekdikti) published statistics of Indonesian higher education at the tertiary level. From a total number of 3,226 tertiary education institutions, in which 573 of them were universities (Ristekdikti, 2018). From 21,5928 million of the college-age population (age 18 to 23), those registered as undergraduate students are as many as 6,603,877. It reaches only 0.003 percent of the whole college-age population. In the master program in Indonesian universities, the number of students was recorded at 371,545 students in 2018. This number illustrates that only about 5.6 percent of undergraduates continue their studies in Indonesian master programs.

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) in 2019, the number of international students studying in Indonesia is around 3,000 students, and this number covers both undergraduate and graduate programs. This inbound student flow number has been consistent since 2014, as reported in The Jakarta Post (Irandoost, 2014, January 11). This could be interpreted from two different perspectives. First, Indonesian higher education has failed to attract international students, and second, the chance to get into the Indonesian master program becomes less competitive for the Indonesians. The later indicates increasing opportunities for Indonesian undergraduates who would continue their studies in the master programs.

Outbound Student Flows

Indonesian outbound student flows continue to grow, even though the number is still relatively modest considering that the country's population is the fourth-largest in the world. In 2017, Indonesia became the third-largest sender of international students among the ASEAN members, but ranked 22nd in the number of students sent abroad worldwide, contributing less than 1 percent of the over 5 million students studying abroad in the same year (Dillas, Mackie & Trines, 2019, para. 12).

However, there has been a 20.6 percent growth of Indonesian degree-seeking students within 5 years. The UIS (2019) recorded a steady growth from 39,448 degree-seeking students in 2013 to 47,574 in 2017. Unfortunately, the UIS has not released the data for 2018

and 2019 to validate the constant growth of Indonesian degree-seeking students. Nevertheless, the increasing number shows the growing enthusiasm of Indonesian students to pursue the master's program abroad.

The top destination country for Indonesian degree-seeking students is Australia with almost 30 percent of the total outbound mobility. The top three destination countries – Australia, the USA, and Malaysia – made up to almost 60 percent of the total outbound student flows of Indonesia. Some other destination countries are the U.K., Japan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands, Korea, and Canada. These host countries, whether they are English speaking or non-English speaking countries, set English as one of the admission requirements.

English Proficiency Requirements for Master Program

University Minimum Standard

Each university set its English proficiency standard for its master program, even Indonesian universities. Surpassing the minimum score of standardized English proficiency tests entails a greater opportunity for enrollment in the master program. The three universities used as examples were taken from the top 100 in the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) university ranking in the area of English (language, literature, and education). The explanation about their minimum score for language requirements should bring light into the current situation.

The first university is the number 1 in QS World University ranking for English program which is Harvard University in the USA. The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences set a minimum score of 80 on the iBT TOEFL[®] or a minimum score of 6.5 on the IELTS[™] Academic test (Apply, 2019). The Graduate School of Education, on the other hand, sets the score a little higher at 104 for iBT TOEFL[®] with individual section scores of at least 26 or at 7.5 for IELTS[™] Academic test with individual section scores of at least 7.5 as well (Join Our Community, 2019). Other standardized tests accepted by Harvard University are the old and new Paper-based TOEFL[®], Graduate Record Examinations (GRE[®]) General Test, and the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT).

The second university is from a different part of the world but is in the top 100 QS World University ranking. The University of Otago in New Zealand hosts international students and provides financial help as well. Its Linguistics master program sets a minimum score of 95 on the iBT TOEFL[®] with a minimum writing score of 22 or a minimum score of 6.5 in the academic module on the IELTS[™] with no individual band below 6.0 (English language requirements, 2019). Other standardized tests acknowledged by the University of Otago are the Paper-based TOEFL[®], Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English (CAE), Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE), Pearson Test of English (PTE) Academic, and their nationally-made standardized English tests.

The third example is the University of Indonesia, an Indonesian university that ranks 296 in QS Global World Ranking, but within the top 100 for its English major. It sets the English proficiency requirements for its national master program at 60 for iBT TOEFL[®] or 5.5 for IELTS[™]. As for the international master program, it sets the requirements at 80 for iBT TOEFL[®] or 6.0 for IELTS[™] (Admissions, 2019, p. 91). Other standardized tests taken by the University of Indonesia are PBT TOEFL[®] and CBT TOEFL[®].

The different minimum score of English proficiency standard sets by each university is influenced by many factors including the acceptance ratio. However, the general minimum standard of English proficiency score is set at 6.5 for IELTS[™] or 80 for iBT TOEFL[®] for overseas universities, and 6.0 for IELTS[™] or 80 for iBT TOEFL[®] for national universities. Hence, mastering academic English to be able to proficiently perform is a must.

Scholarship Minimum Standard

Besides the minimum standard of English proficiency set by the host universities, many offered scholarships for Indonesian students also put English proficiency as one of their application requirements. Among many scholarships offered to Indonesian degree-seeking students, three of the well-known scholarships are those from Indonesian Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP), Fulbright, and Chevening.

LPDP is an Indonesian government-funded scholarship for Indonesian citizens who are seeking masters and doctoral opportunities. It sets two minimum scores for standardized English tests for master’s degree: for those who are pursuing masters in Indonesia and for those who are pursuing masters overseas. For the Indonesian master program, LPDP sets a minimum score of 61 for iBT TOEFL® or 6.0 for IELTS™. Different minimum scores are set for overseas master program, that is a minimum score of 80 for Ibt toefl® or 6.5 for IELTS™. This scholarship also acknowledges PBT TOEFL® (only for Indonesian universities) and TOEIC (LPDP, 2019, P. 6).

The next scholarship is also considered prestigious among Indonesian degree-seeking students. Fulbright master’s degree scholarship is available for those who are seeking a graduate degree at a US university in various fields. The variety of scholarship schemes offered by Fulbright has successfully increased the opportunity for people to pursue their studies in the US. The minimum score requirement for applicants of this scholarship is set at 550 for ITP (PBT) TOEFL® or its IELTS™ equivalent. When the candidates are selected for an award, they will have to take the official iBT TOEFL® with different minimum score requirement depending on the university’s minimum score requirement, plus GRE for all fields except law and business, or GMAT for business administration, finance, and accounting (AMINEF, 2019).

Finally is the fully-funded UK government’s global scholarship for people who want to study in the UK, Chevening scholarship program. This scholarship’s English language requirement is set at 6.5 for IELTS™ Academic or Academic for UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) with a minimum score no less than 5.5 or 79 for iBT TOEFL® with a minimum of 17 for Listening, 18 for Reading, 20 for Speaking, and 17 for Writing. Besides the two tests, Chevening also accepted Pearson PTE Academic, C1 Advanced, Trinity ISE II (B2) (Chevening, 2019).

Different scholarships set different minimum scores for standardized English tests. One note on the matter, applicants should set their minimum score at the highest minimum requirements of both the scholarship and the university.

Indonesian Test-Takers’ Performance

To understand the performance of test-takers in two standardized English tests, this paper presents the discussion from the latest report of iBT TOEFL® and IELTS™ score data summary focusing on the Indonesian test-takers.

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) published annual reports on test and score data summary for TOEIC and TOEFL®, presenting an analysis of test results from January to December. The report shows the total scale score of the test-takers who apply for English-language schools ranges from 24 to 120, and this is below the total scale score of the graduate-level students which is 32 to 120. Setting the reasons aside, the publications in 2018 and 2019 show consistent performance of the Indonesian test-takers. Table 1 shows the summary of Indonesian-nationality test-takers’ score average.

Table 1 Indonesians’ iBT TOEFL® total and section score means

	Reading	Listening	Speaking	Writing	Total
2017	21	22	21	22	85
2018	21	22	21	22	86

(Educational Testing Service, 2018, 2019)

The achievement of Indonesian test-takers in 2017 and 2018 is almost identical seen from the score average. The scores show that there is a balanced performance in the four English skills being tested. The performance in both perceptive and productive English skills is proportional. Furthermore, both the total average score and the individual skill scores surpass the minimum requirements set by most master programs and scholarships. However, it must be understood that the average of 85 and 86 means that some test-takers fell below the score and some got above the score. Nevertheless, the average scores indicate that Indonesian master program candidates have a better opportunity of getting into the program.

Apart from nationality, ETS also reports the test-takers performance based on their native language. Indonesians listed two native languages in the score data: Indonesian and Javanese. The information about the performance of each in 2017 and 2018 is given in Table 2.

Table 2 Indonesians' iBT TOEFL® total and section score means
based on test-takers native language

		Reading	Listening	Speaking	Writing	Total
2017	Indonesian	21	22	21	22	85
	Javanese	17	16	17	17	67
2018	Indonesian	21	22	21	22	86
	Javanese	17	17	16	17	67

(Educational Testing Service, 2018, 2019)

Even though there is a consistent performance between 2017 and 2018, the performance of the two native speakers is significantly different. The Indonesian native speakers' performance average exceeds the minimum standard, but it is not the case with the Javanese native speakers. The average score of the Javanese native speakers falls way below the overseas master program requirement. However, it is above the requirement of Indonesian universities. Therefore, the opportunity of getting into the master's program in Indonesia (even with Indonesian scholarships) exists.

Moving away from iBT TOEFL®, the IELTS™ Organization published a score report of the 2017 test-taker performance on its website. Table 3 shows the average band score of Indonesian test-takers.

Table 3 Mean band score for Indonesian test-takers

Test Version	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Total
Academic	6.55	6.67	5.78	6.27	6.38
General Training	6.07	5.84	5.59	6.01	5.95

(IELTS Organization, 2019b)

The data show that the average performance of those taking the Academic version is higher than those taking the General Training version even though they range around band 6. Looking closer at the individual skill band score, the average of those taking the Academic version is higher than 5.5. It means the test-takers' performance meets the minimum standard requirements of overseas universities and scholarships.

Between the two versions of the test, the report states that the proportion between those who took Academic and General Training is notably different. In 2017, 78.10 percent of the test-takers took the Academic version. This should mean that more than three-quarters of the test-takers took the test for educational purposes, but the data show that the Academic version was chosen for various purposes, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Overall band score based on the reasons for taking IELTS™ Academic

Reason	>4	4	4.5	5	5.5	6	6.5	7	7.5	8	8.5	9
For employment	1%	1%	2%	5%	11%	18%	23%	22%	13%	4%	1%	0%
For higher education extended course (three months or more)	1%	2%	5%	12%	22%	23%	16%	10%	6%	3%	1%	0%
For higher education short course (three months or less)	2%	3%	7%	14%	23%	21%	14%	9%	5%	2%	0%	0%
For immigration	1%	1%	2%	7%	15%	19%	17%	16%	12%	8%	3%	0%
For other education purposes	1%	2%	6%	12%	20%	21%	16%	11%	7%	3%	1%	0%
For personal reasons	1%	2%	6%	13%	20%	21%	16%	11%	6%	2%	0%	0%
For professional registration (NOT medical)	1%	1%	2%	4%	6%	13%	20%	23%	18%	10%	3%	0%
For registration as a dentist	1%	2%	5%	7%	15%	16%	15%	16%	14%	5%	4%	0%
For registration as a doctor	0%	0%	1%	2%	4%	8%	16%	24%	25%	15%	4%	0%
For registration as a nurse (including CGFNS)	0%	0%	1%	2%	7%	16%	26%	27%	15%	5%	1%	0%
(Other)	2%	2%	6%	12%	19%	21%	16%	11%	7%	3%	1%	0%

(IELTS Organization, 2019a)

The demographic data show that regarding educational reasons, the majority of test-takers fall between band 5.5 to band 6.5. Having a minimum score requirement of 6.5 in most universities and scholarships, the statistics illustrate that around 30 percent of the test-takers have the opportunity for getting into the master's program. However, it also means that the majority of the test-takers who aim for academic reasons fail to meet the minimum score requirements to join the program.

The distribution of Indonesian Academic test-takers' performance is shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Overall band score of Indonesian test-takers

Language/Nationality	>4	4	4.5	5	5.5	6	6.5	7	7.5	8	8.5	9
Indonesian	0%	0%	2%	5%	14%	24%	23%	17%	10%	4%	1%	0%

(IELTS Organization, 2019a)

Having the same minimum standard requirement of band 6.5, Table 5 shows that the performance of Indonesian test-takers is positive. Fifty-five percent of the test takers successfully got band 6.5 and above whereas only 5 percent of them got band 5 or lower.

The performance of Indonesian test-takers in both iBT TOEFL® and IELTS™ illustrates a positive attitude toward English proficiency. Most of the Indonesian test-takers meets the minimum standard requirements of both national and overseas universities and scholarships, and it affirms that the Indonesian master program candidates have a high opportunity of getting accepted into the programs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it cannot be rebutted that the role of English in the contemporary academic world leads to better opportunities for further studies. Many opportunities offered

to Indonesian degree-seeking students set a minimum standard requirement of English proficiency and in two standardized English tests, the performance of the Indonesian degree-seeking students surpasses these minimum requirements.

However, the statistics show that some test-takers still fall below the minimum requirement. Hence, a deeper analysis of the facets of each standardized English test from the test papers done by Indonesian test-takers or test-taker candidates will provide a better understanding of the strength and weaknesses of most Indonesian test-takers.

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